



Applying Local Language: Communication on the Road in a Multilingual Society

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Abstract

The sociolinguistic phenomenon called multilingualism has created two different camps. The first camp is the camp of those who believe that the phenomenon is a curse to the society while the second camp believes that it is a source of novel delight and subtle experience, a blessing. Those who believed that multilingualism is a curse find their solace in the biblical history of the tower of Babel as recorded in Genesis 11:9, as a punishment for people's pride. The history of the Dolgan fairy tale and the mother goddess of Acola tribe in New Mexico also supported this view. The Dolgan fairy tale claims that diversity of the tongue is a punishment of people's quarrelling. The New Mexico mother goddess curses his people with multiple tongues to prevent quarrelling. However those who supported the view that multilingualism is a blessing also find their solace in the words of Holy Quran 30:22, where diversity of tongue is seen as a blessing and the new testaments account of the Bible in the Act of Apostle 2:4, where the apostles were empowered with the miraculous gift of tongue.

This work touches upon the view of multilingualism as a blessing and therefore advocates the need to explore the use of mother tongue in multilingual society to give road instructions. This, we discover will reduce road mishaps in our society.

Questionnaires were set out to ask about the educational qualification of most commercial drivers and to know which language they will prefer to see the road instructions. Most of them will be delighted to see the instructions in their local languages. Road users within

Ibadan metropolis were given questionnaire to respond to. Three hundred questionnaires were administered while two hundred and eighty one were recovered which signifies 93.7%. The result shows that most of the road users prefer to see road instructions in their mother tongue.

Key words: Sociolinguistics; Multilingualism; Communication; Road instructions; Mother tongue

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INTRODUCTION

Due to advance in technology, the use of automobile keeps increasing on both the local and major roads. This also is leading to high rate of accident on our roads. However, we cannot discourage the advancement of technology because of the high rate of accident. We can only look for a measure through which the rate of accident on our roads can be reduced. This we believe can be done through sensitization of the road users on the way to use the road properly in order to avert road mishap. The Nigerian road safety commission for instance has been ups and doing this to reduce this menace. There have been lots of measures in this direction; such as public campaign, radio and television jingles and road signs and instructions by the commission. Despite all the efforts of this commission, road accident still persists on our roads. In order to put more effort in place, we advocate the use of local languages for these road instructions. We believe this will reduce the level of road accidents. Our investigation revealed that the road users will prefer to see these instructions in their local language.

It is discovered that there has been total neglect in the use of local languages in carrying out campaigns relating to road use. This has been hindering the proper understanding of the road instructions. Hence, this research was carried out to investigate the role the local languages can play in disseminating the information relating to road use. The major objective of this research is to investigate the opinion of the road users on which language they will prefer to see the road instruction and advocates for the use of local languages. This we believe will serve as part of the measure to reduce road accident. The research was carried out within Ibadan metropolis.

Majority of the previous work on the use of road sign have been directed towards the understanding of road signs. No work known to these researchers has advocated for the use of local language in passing out instructions for the road users. Some of the previous works include Stokes et al. (1995): *Motorist Understanding of Traffic Control Devices in Kansas*. In the work, they evaluated 43 traffic devices in terms of drivers understanding of the meaning of the information ended in the signs and pavement markings. Both multiple choice questionnaire and open encoded questionnaire were used to investigate the pavement markings that were misunderstood by the Kansas drivers and proposed some general recommendation for improving drivers understanding of certain traffic signs.

Another work is Makinde and Opeyemi (2012): *Understanding of Traffic Signs by Drivers – A Case of Akure City, Ondo State, Nigeria*. The study investigated the understanding of traffic signs by drivers in the city of Akure with respect to their personal characteristics such as age, marital status, gender, and educational background. A total of 20 symbolic warnings and regulatory-prohibitory signs were investigated. 200 questionnaires were prepared and distributed within the various motor parks in Akure, 185 of the questionnaires were returned. The analysis showed that there is a low understanding of traffic signs by drivers. The average percentage of drivers who correctly understood the warning and prohibitory signs were 67 and 58%, respectively. Age, Education and years of driving experience played prominent roles in drivers' understanding of signs, however marital status and gender had no effect.

This work however advocates for the use of local languages for the road signs/instructions in order to achieve full understanding of the instructions by the user. This we believe will invariably reduce road accidents.

1. GENERAL BACKGROUND

According to Fakuade (2010), Sociolinguistics is the study of language as it affects and is affected by social relations. Sociolinguistics is a too wide extended umbrella term that encompasses such phenomenon as multilingualism,

bilingualism, language conflict, language displacement, pidgin and Creole languages, language planning etc. and other ways by which language contact affected people of diverse tongue in the society. Fakuade (2010) further explains that sociolinguistics has also been defined as the study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations and context on the way language is used. It overlaps to certain degree with pragmatics. Hence, it has become a powerful tool in analyzing different language situations, events, texts and communication activities. In interactional sociolinguistics, we must analyze our audience by identifying possible appeals to our readership. According to Fakuade (2010), we must keep in mind that good persuaders are able to empathize and sympathize with their audience, building bridges of communality and solidarity. To achieve this, he opined that will must ask the following questions; who are our readers? How do we define them in terms of age, economic and social class, gender, education etc.? What typical attitude or stances toward our topic do they have? What in their background or daily experiences helps explain their point of view? Analyzing our audience we help us to know what they need. When we are working with the public, persuasion helps us to be appropriate in our activities. It is therefore imperative to use appropriate medium to persuade.

According to Gamble and Gamble (2002), sociolinguistics makes us to understand that communicative act itself is characterized by the interplay of certain elements. These elements help to understand communication. Without these elements communication may not have said to have taken pace.

According to Ofulue (2009), mother Tongue as a sociolinguistic term refers to a speaker's indigenous, local or native language. It is usually a speaker's first language and is acquired not learned. The term, like first language should not be understood literally to mean a speaker's mother's language. Rather, mother tongue refers to the language acquired within the speaker's local environment and identifies the speaker's native culture. In this regard, it is the language in which the speaker best expresses his/her world view. For some, it is the only language they speak (monolingual), while for bilinguals, it is the first language. For example, an individual of Yoruba origin who grows up in Yoruba land will have Yoruba as his/her mother tongue, while another individual also of Yoruba origin but who grows up in the United Kingdom may have English as his/her mother tongue. In terms of function, the mother tongue is a variety that expresses one's ethnic and national identity. Thus, it is often used as the language of ethnic interaction. In language learning it is referred to as the L1. It is also assumed that a speaker is required to have mastery in speaking and listening skills in the mother tongue, and reading and writing where it is a codified

language. Using this language to communicate makes communication smooth and easy. Hence, there is the need to use the mother tongue for instructions on roads.

Communication is the act of sending and receiving of information. Communication is the process of giving, getting, or sharing of information with others. The only instrument used in the sharing of information is language. If information is not properly coded for one reason or the other communication may not take place. The language in use must be understood by the receiver of the message in order for communication to take place. The only medium of communication is language and the major essence of language is communication.

Communication is a process with many parts and participants. There are elements of communication that cannot be abridged if communication must take place. They include the following; the sender, message, channel, receiver and the feedback. Each of these elements is very essential to a successful communication. The channel is the most essential to us in this work. The channel is the language used in communication. In this work we advocate the use of local languages for road instructions. It is imperative to state it clearly at this juncture that the use of wrong channel (language) may hinder communication. When there is no common language between the sender and the receiver of information then communication barrier sets in. It is therefore essential for the sender of information to use a language that the receiver will understand.

Road instructions are the instructions given on the road by the concerned authority to the road users in order to avert chaos on the road. The road users include both the private and the commercial drivers and the pedestrian. Road signs control the flow of traffic, warn you of hazards ahead, guide you to your destination, and inform you of roadway services. Intentionally road signs are colour coded to assist the operator. According to Kirmizioglu and Tuydes-Yaman (2012), traffic signs are the oldest and most commonly used traffic control device (TCD). These signs convey messages in words or symbols and erected to regulate, warn, or guide the road users (motorists, and pedestrians etc). Traffic signs are commonly used traffic safety tools, mainly developed to provide crucial information in a short time to support safe drive; but the success depends on their comprehensibility by the drivers.

In Nigeria, the authority concerned with the rules and regulations on the road is named Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC)

2. METHODOLOGY

The method used in this work involved the use of questionnaire, interview and participant observation. The questionnaire was administered and completed by the road users. Both the intra and intercity commercial

drivers were involved. The private car drivers and Okada (motorcycle) riders also completed questionnaires. The commercial drivers were chosen at random from major motor parks within Ibadan. Ibadan is the Headquarter of Oyo state, in the south western part of Nigeria. The motor parks include; Iwo Road, New Gbagi Motor Park, Gate Motor Park, Bodija Motor Park, and Sango Motor Parks. The private car drivers were selected from government offices.

The questionnaire used was made up of three sections. The first two sections which are section A and B were made up of short answers to questions while the third section was made up of multiple choice questions.

The first section was designed to know the personal details of the respondents such as age, gender, educational background, marital status and occupation. The second section was designed to know the linguistic background of the respondents such as the first language, number of language spoken, and the most fluent language of the respondent. The third section seeks to know the knowledge of the respondent in relation to road instructions and the language they will prefer to see these instructions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Three hundred questionnaires were administered but two hundred and eighty one were recovered which indicates 93.7% of the total respondent.

3.1 Personal Details

Table 1 below summarises the personal details of the 281 drivers; 240 were males while 41 were females which show 85.4% and 14.6% of the total respondent respectively. The ratio of female to male is relatively low because the female gender is not involved in commercial driving in this part of the country. Although there is no restriction on female commercial driver, it is unusual to see female driving commercial vehicle in this part of the world.

The age distribution showed that the younger people have the larger percentage of the total population of the respondent. 28.1% were between (20-25) years, 29.5% were between (26-30) years, 23.8% were between (31-35) years, 11 % were between (36-40) years while 7.5% were between 41 and above years.

The table shows that most of the respondents are married. 66.5% are married, 32.1% are single while 1.4% are divorced. It is obvious from the data that most of the drivers are married which shows that majority of them have family to care for. This will influence their working status. The educational background of the respondents showed that 15.3% has less than WAEC qualification, 35.2% has WAEC qualification. The result further indicates that 23.5% have HND and 12.1% have B.sc/BA. The result shows that the drivers are not well educated.

Table 1
Age Distribution

	Characteristics	Sample number	Percentage
Age	20-25	79	28.1
	26-30	83	29.5
	31-35	67	23.84
	36-40	31	11
	40 and above	21	7.5
Gender	Male	240	85.4
	Female	41	14.6
	Below WAEC	43	15.3
Educational background	WAEC	99	35.2
	NCE/ND	66	23.5
	HND	39	13.9
	<u>B.SC/BA</u>	34	12.1
Marital status	Married	187	66.54
	Single	90	32.1
	Divorced	4	1.4
Occupation	Driving	189	67.25
	Others	92	32.74

Out of the total respondents, 67.25% are drivers while others are 32.74%. The others are either artisans or Civil servants. This shows that majority of our respondents are commercial drivers that ply the roads often.

3.2 Linguistic Background

Table 2 shows the linguistic background of the drivers. The information here is retrieved to know the driver's first language, number of language they speak, other language they speak and the language in which they are most fluent. The data show that 44.5% speak more than one language comfortably while 55.5% speak only one language. 74.7% has Yoruba as their first language. This is not surprising since the research is carried out in Ibadan, a Yoruba dominated city. 1.8% speaks Edo, 11.4% speaks Hausa, 8.5% speak Igbo, 1.1% speaks Bini and 2.5% speaks Fulfulde as their first language. On other languages spoken apart from their first language; 26.3% speaks English, 13.2% speak Yoruba, 2.8% speak Hausa, and 2.1% speaks Igbo as their second language.

The data show that majority of the respondents are monolingual and the language they speak is Yoruba. However, it is pertinent to note that about 95% of the respondents have what Kachru (1969) describes as zero point of competence of language in the English language.

The result shows that 98.9% of the drivers speak their first language fluently while only 1.06% cannot fluently speak their first language. The data show further that 73.7% can perfectly read and understand

their first language while 26.3% can partially read and understand their first language. 48.8% are able to read

Table 2
The Linguistic Background of the Drivers

	Characteristics	Sample number	Percentage (%)
Number of language spoken	Only one language	125	44.5
	More than one languages	156	55.5
First language	Yoruba	210	74.7
	Edo	5	1.8
	Hausa	32	11.4
	Igbo	24	8.5
	Bini	3	1.1
	Fulfulde	7	2.5
Second language	English	74	26
	Yoruba	37	13.2
	Hausa	8	2.8
Most fluent language	Igbo	6	2.1
	First language	278	98.9
	Other language	3	1.06
Reading and understanding in first language	Perfectly	207	73.7
	Partially	74	26.3
Reading and understanding in second language	Perfectly	137	48.8
	Poorly	144	51.2

and understand English perfectly while 51.2% of the respondent responded poorly to this question. This data shows the level of their comprehension of the English language which invariably affects their reading and understanding of road instructions.

4. KNOWLEDGE OF ROAD SIGNS/ INSTRUCTIONS AND LANGUAGE OF PREFERENCE

This section sought to know the knowledge of the road users concerning the road signs/instructions and the language they will prefer the instructions to be written. The following results were gotten and show in Table 3. Table 3 reveals that 99.3% of the drivers are aware that there are Road Signs/Instructions while only 0.7% claimed to be unaware of the Road Signs/Instruction. This shows that the drivers are aware of the presence of Road Signs/Instructions. The data further reveals that 25.97% read Road Signs/Instructions while 74.02. 56.7% claimed that they do not care about the road instructions while 43.3% gave language barrier as the reason for not reading it.

Ten Warning Signs and ten Regulatory Signs were presented to the drivers to test their knowledge of

understanding of Road Signs. The result shows that 40.9% understand the Road Signs while 59.1% do not understand the Signs. The Signs that were understood are those that are self-explanatory like Warning Signs.

On which language the drivers would prefer to see the Road Signs/Instructions to be written, 58.1 % prefer their first language. They opined that this will give them the real meaning and better understanding of the instructions. 17.4% prefer English since English is the lingual Franca and 24.5% prefer a mixture of both English and the language of immediate environment. The result reveals that the largest percentages of the drivers prefer the use of the language of immediate environment. Thus, we advocate the use of local languages for proper communication to take place.

Table 3
Knowledge of Road Signs/Instructions and Language of Preference

	Characteristics	Sample number	Percentage (%)
Do you know there are road signs/instructions	Yes	279	99.3
	No	2	0.7
Do you read road instructions	Yes	73	25.97
	No	208	74.02
	I don't care	118	56.7
why	Language barrier	90	43.3
	Understood	115	40.9
Understanding of road signs	Don't understand	166	59.1
	First language	163	58
L a n g u a g e preference	English	49	17.4
	Both	69	24.5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is imperative for road users to understand Road Signs/Instructions. This will reduce road mishaps. Perfect communication can never be achieved on the road if the language used is not understood by the road users. There is therefore the need to use a language that the drivers understood. The result of the data presented shows that the level of comprehension of the Road Signs/Instructions is relatively low. This can be attributed to the language barrier. Most of the drivers prefer their local language to be used. This also demonstrates that people are loyal to their language. The need for adequate communication called for the use of correct medium which is the language and the language advocated by this research is the use of local languages in writing the Road Instructions.

Since people are loyal to their language and it gives them better comprehension of messages, it is therefore imperative for the concern authorities to adopt the use of local language that people prefer in carrying out their activities such as public campaign and the written of Road Instructions. Language plays a prominent role in communication. It is important to use language that people will understand to achieve the aim of communication and save lives. We therefore recommend the use of language of immediate environment to write road instructions. We believe that there is no amount of money and efforts that are spent to save life that is too much.

The concern authority should emulate the media houses and even the Nokia. If Nokia could incorporate the use of Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and other local languages on their cell phone, there is nothing stopping the Federal Road Safety Commission from making use of local languages to save lives. The Central Bank of Nigeria had laid a good example by commissioned the National Institute of Nigerian languages, Aba to write the denominations in indigenous languages (Yusuf, 2010). We therefore recommend that the Federal Road Safety Commission borrows from the Central Bank of Nigeria initiative by writing Road Signs/Instructions in local languages.

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